



Heat Emergency Awareness: Hot Weather Tips and Heat-related Illnesses

Marylanders should be aware of the dangers posed by extreme heat. Anyone can be a victim of a heat-related illness, such as people working or exercising on hot days. Those most at risk are children under age 5, people over age 65, people with chronic illnesses and disabilities, and people taking certain medications. The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) offers the following hot weather tips Marylanders should follow, as well as information on recognizing and treating heat-related illnesses.

Hot Weather Tips:

- Drink plenty of fluids, such as water and fruit juice, to prevent dehydration. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. During heavy exercise in a hot environment, drink two to four glasses (16-32 ounces) of cool fluids each hour. Avoid alcohol, caffeine and overly sweetened beverages.
- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight and light-colored clothes.
- Avoid direct sunlight by staying in the shade and wear sunscreen, a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.
- Avoid using salt tablets unless your doctor told you to take them.
- Stay in air-conditioned areas when possible. If your home is not air-conditioned, consider a visit to a shopping mall or public library or stay with family or friends who have air conditioning. Contact your local health department to see if there are cooling shelters open in your area. Maryland residents in need of energy assistance to keep cool should call 2-1-1, Maryland's information and referral service, to see if there are resources available to help.
- Electric fans may provide comfort, but will not prevent heat-related illnesses on very hot days.
- NEVER leave pets or children in a car, even with the windows cracked.
- Check on elderly relatives or neighbors at least daily, and make sure they have a cool environment to live in during extreme heat.
- Take it easy when outdoors. Athletes and those who work outdoors should take short breaks when feeling fatigued. Schedule physical activity during the morning or evening when it is cooler.

Heat-related Illnesses:

- **Heat cramps** are caused by a loss of water and salt from heavy sweating. Heat cramps can cause muscle pains and spasms. They are not as serious as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. To treat heat cramps, get the victim to a cool place to rest comfortably. Lightly stretch the cramped muscle, and give the person plenty of liquids.
- **Heat exhaustion** is a milder form of heat stroke that may develop due to a combination of several days with high temperatures and dehydration in an individual. Signs of heat exhaustion include cool, moist, pale or flushed skin; extreme weakness; muscle cramps; nausea; or headache. Victims may also vomit or faint. Heat exhaustion is treated with plenty of liquids and rest in a cool, shaded area. Those on a low-sodium diet or with other health problems should contact a doctor. Get medical attention if heat exhaustion symptoms worsen or last longer than an hour.
- **Heat stroke** is a serious illness characterized by a body temperature greater than 105 degrees. Symptoms may include dry, red skin; rapid, weak pulse; rapid, shallow breathing; convulsions; disorientation; delirium; and coma. Onset of heat stroke can be rapid; serious symptoms can occur within minutes. Treatment involves the rapid lowering of body temperature using a cool bath or wet towels. If the victim refuses water, is vomiting or has fainted, do not give anything to eat or drink. Keep victims of heat stroke in a cool area and immediately call 911.

Heat Monitoring and Reporting:

From the end of May through the beginning of September, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) monitors temperature conditions and advisories issued by the National Weather Service and alerts residents of Extreme Heat Events. Reports are issued weekly, or daily during extended Extreme Heat Events.

The reports provide guidance and information about deaths and illness caused by extreme heat in the region. To see the reports, visit www.dhmh.maryland.gov/extremeheat.